**“The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility.”**

We as humans are constantly learning and never stop once we are brought into the world and this leads us to the question, **does the possession of knowledge carry with it an ethical responsibility? And if so, what ethical considerations? The statement, “The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility,” does hold some validity as most people would agree with this statement however some sceptics might argue that not all the knowledge brings with it ethical responsibilities. The knowledge you may receive might be a minor detail of something that is not of any significance and will not affect anyone in anyway and therefor this may be seen as not carrying any ethical responsibility. This is why we need to look at the possession of knowledge as a whole and not just as single case scenarios. There will always be some information that requires more ethical responsibilities than others. This makes it difficult for us to answer the claim, “The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility.”**

**The first thing we need to look at is how to determine what is morally correct? There are many disputes between what is morally correct and what is immoral. It is extremely difficult to justify between them because there is such a big grey area in between them and people’s opinions are not all the same and vary greatly. This all comes under the topic of ethics and moral relativism. Ethics are the moral principles that govern a person’s or group’s behaviour or some may define it as moral correctness of a specified conduct. It all concerns principles of right and wrong behaviour in everyone and how they choose to act knowing their consequences. Our own personal values are determined by the culture we grew up in and our moral judgments and values are just our natural outlooks brought upon by the society and culture in which we were brought up in. You might share the same values as those that have surrounded you your whole life or your values could have strayed from theirs because of them. Either way the basis of your moral values would have been built up from when you were small and may change along the way. This explains how diverse different people’s morals are and why so many of them conflict with each other. This prompts the question, are there universal morals? Are there a set of values that are considered morally correct all over the world by every society out there? The four ways of knowing can all affect ones moral values. They could use reason to explain why they think it is right by using logic, they could use emotion to explain why they think it’s right because that’s how they feel about it, they could use sense perception to explain why they think it’s right because that is how they see it from their point of view or they could use language to explain why they think it’s right by the use of their language. For example, if Daniel cheats on an exam, his friend might tell him that it is wrong by using reason. Because Daniel has cheated he gains an extra advantage over the other students which logically defies the purpose of the exam and he has broken the rules. Therefore, using reason, Daniel’s conduct was immoral. Most cases are not as basic as the example but those are the essentials of ethics.**

**We need to think of what does knowledge bring with it and whether or not you want to do the right or the wrong thing with this information.** When you gain knowledge, you could help others or choose a different path that might affect others in a negative way. That is why when people obtain knowledge, they must use it wisely and for the morally right reasons. Gaining knowledge does bring extra responsibility because it opens up more opportunities whether they being good or bad. Other things knowledge might bring to you is: power, responsibility, information, new technology, hidden benefits, ethical decisions and leadership. All of these traits that come with knowledge can be very dangerous if we do not consider our ethical responsibilities. Imagine how safe you would feel if a certain person with no morals gained valuable knowledge that could threaten the existence of millions of people. For example, if a mad man gained knowledge of a weapon of mass destruction with the intent to use it. He would not stop to consider all the lives he would be affecting and judging whether what he is doing is right or wrong. Obviously this is an extreme example and will not happen in our everyday lives but it highlights the importance of knowing the ethical responsibilities that comes with gaining knowledge. This leads on to the idea of utilitarianism and whether we should all follow it. Utilitarianism is based on one supreme moral principle and that is that everyone should to what is necessary in order to insure the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Basically what you do should be for the greater good of the people and a basic test of this theory is, would you risk the life of an innocent man to save the lives of ten other people? It is morally wrong for most people to kill an innocent man but if you believe in utilitarianism then you did what is considered morally correct. The most difficult part of this theory is determining a way to measure happiness as it is an abstract feeling and varies greatly between different people. It is just as hard as predicting the consequences of your actions and basing a decision upon it. This is another difficult element we are forced to consider while believing in the idea of utilitarianism. With the responsibility placed upon you from the possession of knowledge you sort of feel the hero or villain aspect as you choose what to do with what knowledge brings with it.

There are so many examples of why we must consider ethical responsibilities while we accumulate knowledge, here are a couple of them:

Take into account the scenario of an innocent bystander that has not got a lot of money and cannot afford shelter or any health care for his 4 year old son who is very sick. The state has refused to offer him support so he is left to take care of himself and his son. One day he finds a hard drive that contains the military defence plans for his country and sharing this information will definitely result in thousands of deaths of his fellow countrymen. If he were to sell this information he would make lots of money and will be able to take care of himself and his son and enable them to have a better life. If he does not share this information his son will soon die and he will continue his knowing life he could have saved his son. If you were this man, would you sell the information and save your one son or should you keep it and save thousands of your countrymen?

If you are a student in high school and you come by some exciting new gossip about a person you hate and sharing this information would embarrass her so much it will force her to move schools and endanger her future chances of going to college as she will not be able to get over the incident. However, this girl has tormented you all throughout middle school and now again in high school. Is it fair for you to share this information that you have acquired? Or is it morally incorrect?

Once you ask yourself these questions and try to imagine the situations you soon realise that justifying what is right and wrong is extremely difficult and it is hard to give a definite answer when trying to agree or disagree with the claim, “**The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility.” If you look at possession as a whole you could agree that it carries ethical responsibilities in some cases but it depends on what your morals are as there is no universal moral code. So you can never be too sure of what ethical responsibilities knowledge brings.**